

How The 5x5 Rule Alleviated My Teaching Anxiety For Good



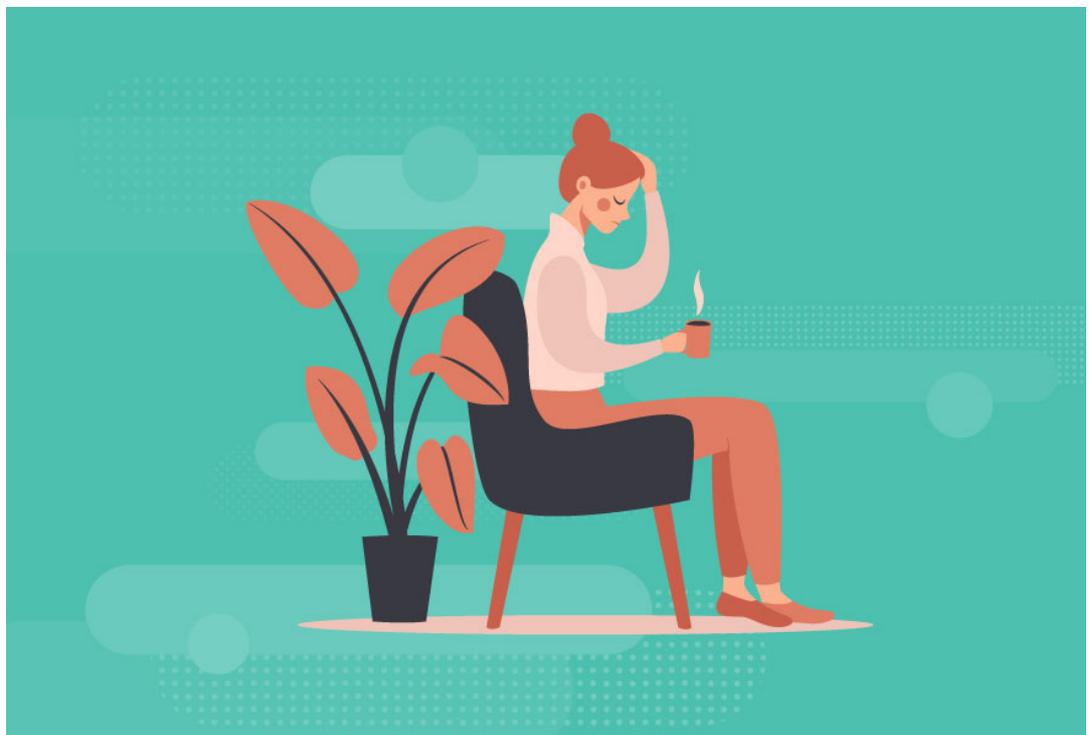
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Head of Content and Curriculum, Julie Mason, shares her favorite strategy for addressing your teaching anxiety. She then suggests the value in teaching this strategy to your students.

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When I was an instructional coach, one of the first questions I asked teachers was always: "What is keeping you up at night?" I never worked with a teacher who didn't have a long list of worries that she was losing sleep over. When everyone's responses varied, there were trends.

Here were some of the top anxieties that teachers shared:

- My students aren't motivated and I don't know how to motivate them.
- I never feel like I am done working; there is always something I missed or didn't get to.
- Parents don't respect me or value the work I do with their children.
- I don't have the energy to try something new or grow in my teaching practice.
- My students behavior is impossible to manage, and I don't know how to help my students.
- I am living paycheck to paycheck and I am not sure how I am going to save for my future.

As I type this list, I find myself nodding. I can relate to so many of these worries because mine were similar. When coaching, I noticed that teachers would go down a worry spiral where one anxiety led to another. I couldn't help but wonder if all of this worrying was unproductive wasted brainpower.

The strategy I recommend to teachers who find themselves in a worry spiral is the 5x5 rule.

Here's how it works:

1. Write out a list of everything that is keeping you up at night.
Don't censor yourself and try not to edit your list. The goal is to get it down on paper.
2. Re-read your list and ask yourself if what you are worried about will matter in five years.
3. Cross out the things that won't matter. By writing them down you are naming these worries. By crossing them out, you are releasing these worries.
4. Look at the things that you feel will matter, and take action. Can you talk through your worries with a therapist? Can you write more about how you are feeling, and by doing so release some of your anxiety?
5. Leave your list, and come back to it in a few days. Do you still feel that these worries will matter in five year

Perspective is powerful. Anxiety in the present might dissipate in a few days. Give yourself space and time, and then come back to your list. You will likely find that your feelings have changed.

Using the 5x5 Rule With Students

I believe that the strategies that we find helpful for ourselves are strategies worth sharing with our students. We know that our students have their own worries that are keeping them up at night. Many of these worries are related to school. Students might be anxious about an upcoming test. Students might be worried that they aren't going to make the soccer team or get a role in the play. We ask a lot of our students, but we don't always teach them strategies for how to manage their emotions and stress. Why don't we make time to teach those skills?

You can share the 5x5 rule with your students. Model the process, and walk them through it. Give them the opportunity to use some class time to generate their list of worries. Provide time and space for them to come back to their list a few days later. Giving your students your the gift of perspective is equally important as teaching them how to correctly punctuate a sentence or use the Distributive Property.

How do you address your worries? Share with us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#).

Julie Mason is the Head of Content and Curriculum for TeacherVision. She brings expertise in blended and personalized learning, instructional coaching, and curriculum design to the role. She was a middle and high school English teacher for eight years and most recently taught at Dana Hall, an all-girls school in Wellesley, MA. She was a blended and personalized learning instructional coach for K-12 teachers at BetterLesson for two years, and she has presented at The National Principals Conference, ISTE, and ASCD where she shared her expertise on how instructional coaching builds teacher capacity in K-12 schools. She has extensive experience designing and facilitating professional development for teachers, and she oversees the TeacherVision advisory board.

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